

Negotiation of Claude Debussy's Sonata for Cello and Piano

by

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ABSTRACT

The Sonata for Cello and Piano (1915) was one of the last three sonatas written by Claude Debussy (1862–1918). When Debussy composed the sonata, France was involved in World War I and Debussy was influenced by political dogmas that sought to advance nationalism as well as the use of French traditions in musical compositions. By discussing the political impact of World War I on French music, this paper will place the Sonata in a context that strengthens the understanding of the work.

Debussy, who participated in the political project of seeking out tradition as the protector of French culture, also presents his understanding of what French tradition is in this sonata. An analytical description of the structure, thematic materials, harmonies and intervallic relationships of the Sonata reveals Debussy's approach of combining the elements that he observed from his French predecessors, as well as his own innovations in the work as he negotiated musical world that was controlled by political dogma.

DEDICATION

Dedicated to my parents, for their selfless support of my education.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In a letter to Bernardo Molibari on October 6, 1915, French composer Claude Debussy (1862–1918) stated his plan of composing a series of sonatas for various instrumental combinations: “There are going to be six of them for different groups of instruments and the last one will combine all those used in the previous five.”¹ Illness, however, took the composer’s life away in 1918 before his project was completed, and he finished only three sonatas. The Sonata for Cello and Piano (1915) is one of the last three sonatas that Debussy wrote before his death. Beside the Sonata for Cello and Piano, Debussy also wrote the Sonata for Flute, Viola and Harp, and the Sonata for Violin and Piano. Among these sonatas, the cello sonata is the first chamber music work from the series that presents his musical response toward the politically controlled society in wartime France.

In the Sonata for Cello and Piano, Debussy’s musical reaction should not simply be narrowly interpreted as his antipathy toward the broken society that World War I brought to France, as Matthew Bown states: “At the outbreak of World War I . . . Debussy expressed his nationalism more explicitly once hostilities began in work such as *Berceuse*

¹ Claude Debussy, *Debussy Letters*, selected and edited by François Lesure and Roger Nichols, translated by Roger Nichols (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987).

Héroïque, *Page d'album*, *En blanc et noir*, the Sonata for Cello and Piano, and *Ode à la France*.”² Rather, Debussy’s writing in this sonata reflects his negotiation of political dogmas that were rooted in French culture and empowered in French musical society. The core political dogma promoted by *Patrie Française* and the *Action Française* was the formation of French identity, national values, and “authentic” French culture. During the outbreak of World War I, *Patrie Française* and *Action Française* rebuffed all foreign traits that would pollute the “purity” of French culture and art. Jane F. Fulcher points out that music was no exception: “this classic dogma was tyrannical, and it was the task of state institutions to impose its tenets, if through the prism of their specific professional concerns, means, and techniques.”³ Though he agreed generally with the political endeavor of protecting the French tradition in art, Debussy also strongly questioned such a dogma’s role in music, as promoted by d’Indy and his *Schola Cantorum*. In the Sonata for Cello and Piano, Debussy explores and derives materials from his French predecessors (like Jean-Philippe Rameau and Jean-Baptiste Lully), while also using his own musical approach to negotiate prevailing political dogma.

By closely examining Debussy’s use of form, thematic materials, harmony, intervallic relationships, and his approach to tonality in the Sonata for Cello and Piano,

² Matthew Bown, *Debussy Redux: The Impact of His Music On the Popular Culture* (Indiana University Press, 2012), 140.

³ Jane F. Fulcher, “Speaking the Truth to Power: The Dialogic Element in Debussy’s Wartime Compositions,” in *Debussy and His World*, edited by Jane F. Fulcher (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 206.

with the understanding of the political context in France, it can be argued that Debussy merges both French musical elements and his own creativities in this work. The work can be seen as his negotiation of the musical world of a wartime France controlled by political doctrines.

CHAPTER 2

THE COMPLICATED CONNECTION BETWEEN POLITICAL DOGMA AND MUSIC

When Debussy began his last collection of compositions, France was struggling with major issues that were not only caused by the outbreak of World War I, but also by the complications resulting from political battles in the country's past. Among all the conflicts, the Dreyfus affair, a political scandal, posed the strongest challenge to the authority of the Third Republic, and initiated certain instabilities in French society. In 1894, the French government sentenced Alfred Dreyfus, a French artillery officer of Alsatian and Jewish descent, to life imprisonment for espionage. In 1898, French writer Émile Zola pointed out judicial errors and the lack of serious evidence in an open letter. The public was infuriated by the injustice of the Republic, and pressed for the case to be reopened. Dreyfus was eventually set free in 1906. However, the affair deeply divided French society into two groups: Dreyfusards, who were supported by Republican Left; and the Anti-Dreyfus, endorsed by the Ligue de la Patrie Française and the Action Française, both of which later advanced their political dogmas in French culture during wartime.

The growth of the Ligue de la Patrie Française and the Action Française is attributed to their persistent destabilization of the authority of the Republicans. Defeated allies after the Dreyfus affair, the Patrie Française and the Action Française continued to challenge

the government for its failure to eliminate corruption in the parliament as well as for being irresponsibly neglectful of the French electorate.⁴ Meanwhile, they deftly enlisted intellectuals from prominent institutions to be members of the alliance, primarily from the Academie Française, the Institut de France and the Collège de France.⁵ Because the Patrie Française and the Action Française did not form as a party, they subtly promoted their dogma through various new networks of communication and “sociability,” such as journals, publishing houses, and several prestigious Parisian salons.⁶ Consequently, aided by loyal intellectuals, the Patrie Française and the Action Française rooted their dogma in French culture through critics and institutions.

The dogma—the formation of a French identity, national values, and “authentic” French culture—was advocated by two leading theoreticians of the Patrie Française and the Action Française: Charles Maurras and Maurice Barrès.⁷ Maurras, who was the founder of the Ligue de l’Action Française, attributed his “political perception of the necessity of a return to monarchy to his search for the basis principles of the order, which he believed inherited in great art.”⁸ The quote has strange grammar; make sure to revisit

⁴ Jane Fulcher, *French Cultural Politics and Music* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 5.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁷ Fulcher, “Speaking the Truth to Power”, 204.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 204.

it and check its accuracy. Barrès, the leading figure of La Patrie Française, concurred with Maurras and placed much emphasis on the tight relationship between French politics and art. They stated:

Politics and art should be imbued with the same national spirit from which each was originally born. For “the French” comprised not only a language, but a mode of thought and feeling, or common values and traits that bound the community in a political and aesthetic whole. Literature and art, for French nationalists, were thus “the principal model and support of politics,” expressive of “the ideal form and fundamental nature of the national community and the people.”⁹

In addition, with a specific conductive concept of the role of art, the Action Française claimed, “the great artists should have always not rejected, but harmoniously incorporated the influence of their national predecessors.”¹⁰

When this dogma was implemented in the music field, the essential doctrine was interpreted as the search for a tradition of French music and an effort to weed out “foreign” elements that would contaminate a “pure” French musical identity.¹¹ The supposed foreign elements referred to here were German. In the practice of such a doctrine, music institutions were charged with the significant mission of propagation, as Jane Fulcher describes:

⁹ Fulcher, “Speaking the Truth to Power,” 205.

¹⁰ Ibid., 206.

¹¹ Ibid., 206-207. Of course there is no such thing either in the arts or culture that carries no traits of foreign influence.

All cultural institutions, including those of music, were to be shaped into being purveyors of national memory and myth thus to instill a unified wartime identity in a still politically and culturally fractured France.¹²

German music at this point, however, occupied a significant portion of the curriculum of French institutions and comprised the majority of concert repertoires.¹³ The question whether all German music should be removed from French culture became crucial.

Of all the French music institutions, the response from Vincent d'Indy with his Schola Cantorum was the most radical. D'Indy became the director of the Schola Cantorum in 1894, and was also a member of *Patrie Française*. D'Indy believed that, as far as decreasing the importance of the German tradition in French music, "German influence could be acceptable if it was assimilated in a distinctively French spirit,"¹⁴ and Barrès immediately agreed with him, particularly in considering the value of Wagner's works. Both Barrès and d'Indy thought that Wagner's musical writing emphasized the abolition of an irrational attachment to the tradition of the nation as well as to national myth; they both believed that Wagner's approach provided an example for the French while the nation was searching for its own musical tradition.¹⁵ As d'Indy preserved the importance of Wagner, he also argued that music should be a vehicle for preaching

¹² *Ibid.*, 204.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 207.

¹⁴ Jane Fulcher, *French Cultural Politics and Music*, 106.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 33.

political dogma. D'Indy recognized the symphony as the genre that best expressed the tenets of his political dogma, because of its structure, the sonata form or the cyclical sonata form. To him, sonata form represented a sense of balance, which he saw as a defining characteristic of French art.¹⁶ Aside from the political implications of the symphony, d'Indy's attention to this genre also expressed his affection for César Franck and Ludwig van Beethoven, whom he considered to have perfected the cyclical sonata form of the symphony.¹⁷ Based on such reasons, d'Indy gave the Schola Cantorum a very French-based curriculum, which highlighted French composers in French music history (such as Couperin and Rameau) and excluded most German compositions, with the exception of Wagner's operas and Beethoven's symphonies. Supported by the Ligue La Patrie Française and Action Française, the curriculum of the Schola Canturom gradually became the model for all French musical institutions, yet it was also considered as the incarnation of political dogma.

Responding to the standardized curriculum for music institutions, Gabriel Fauré modeled the Conservatory's program on d'Indy's innovations as soon as he was appointed as the director of Conservatoire National de Musique. Fauré's acceptance of the Schola's curriculum, however, cannot be understood as his absolute agreement with d'Indy's beliefs. A believer in the importance of the German influence, Fauré did not

¹⁶ Ibid., 146.

¹⁷ Andrew Thomson, "d'Indy, (Paul Marie Théodore) Vincent," *Grove Music Online*, s.v., accessed September, 30, 2015, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com>.

think the structural nature of the symphony conveyed the political connotations that d'Indy contended. Rather, to Fauré, the symphony was simply a metaphorical celebration of nature.¹⁸ While absorbing the political doctrine in the curriculum, Faure's belief is clearly revealed in an article written after being appointed as director of the Conservatory in 1905:

I want to be the auxiliary to an art that is at once classical and modern, which sacrifices neither current taste to established tradition nor tradition to the vagaries of current style. But that which I advocate above all else is liberalism: I don't want to exclude any serious ideas. I am not biased toward any one school and censure no genre that is the product of a well-conceived doctrine.¹⁹

As d'Indy's political dogma influenced musical education, musicians raised a new concern of how to protect French music from alleged future pollution by Germanic music.²⁰ Because music institutions were not given the political responsibility of banning new foreign music in France, a need arose to establish an official body with such a mandate. For this reason, the Ligue pour la Défense de la Musique Française was formed in 1916. The president of the League was Charles Tenroc, and many contemporaries of Debussy joined the League as well, among them Camille Saint-Saëns, Theodore Dubois, Gustave Charpentier, Vicent d'Indy, Xavier Leroux, and Charles Lecoq. Because of his poor health, Debussy did not join the League. Wisely enough, the League also included

¹⁸ Fulcher, *French Cultural Politics and Music*, 101.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 145.

²⁰ Fulcher, "Speaking the Truth to Power," 207.

two politicians: the co-presidents of the Groupe Parlementaire de l'Art, Paul Meunier and Lucien Miller.²¹ The League was in charge of preventing any contemporary German and Austrian music from being performed publicly in France, as well as actively promoting French music and musicians during wartime.²² As Fulcher states:

For this group, according to the statutes of the league, intended to act simultaneously on both the musical and political worlds through the following practices and means of action: propaganda, intervention with those in power, demands for reform in specific government contracts and rules of the state-sponsored schools.²³

Debussy's reaction to the politics of the period can be seen from two different angles. Regarding political dogma, Debussy agreed with the theory of Action Française that a return to the origin of French culture was crucial to the protection of the country. In March of 1915, he wrote an article that urgently expressed his concern for protecting the tradition of French music:

For many years now I have been saying the same thing: that we have been unfaithful to the musical tradition of our race for more than a century and a half ... since Rameau we have had no purely French tradition.²⁴

²¹ Ibid., 208.

²² Ibid., 207.

²³ Ibid., 208.

²⁴ Ibid., 212.

At the same time, Debussy constantly challenged d'Indy's evaluation of Wagner, and disagreed that Wagner had ennobled French music. He insisted that Wagnerism could not help the French to find its musical tradition. It is noteworthy that before Debussy discovered Javanese gamelan music at the Exposition Universelle in Paris in 1889, he was influenced strongly by Wagner. As Pierre Louÿs recounted, "[Debussy] made and won a bet that he could play Tristan by heart."²⁵ The most evidential work of Debussy's Wagnerian influence is his opera *Pelléas et Mélisande*, written in the same year. In the opera, Debussy drew heavily on Wagnerian leitmotif and chromaticism. Debussy's early fascination with Wagner can be dated back to one of his six cantatas, *Daniel*. Written in 1882, Debussy employed for the first time leitmotifs to represent the characters: "Balthazar's drunkenness" leitmotif, "Adena's foreboding" leitmotif, the "Doom" leitmotif, and the "pronouncement of God" leitmotif.²⁶ His other works revealing Wagnerian influence were *La damoiselle élue* and the *Cinq poèmes de Baudelaire*.²⁷ As Debussy sought a French tradition, however, he aimed to erase Wagnerian traits in his compositions. During the time of writing *Pelléas et Mélisande*, he pointedly expressed to Chausson that he found it difficult to avoid "the ghost of old Klingsor, alias Richard

²⁵ François Lesure, "Debussy, Claude," *Grove Music Online*, accessed September 3, 2015, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline>

²⁶ John R. Clevenger, "Debussy's Rome Cantatas," in *Debussy and His World*, ed. Jane Fulcher (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 17.

²⁷ François Lesure, "Debussy, Claude," *Grove Music Online*, accessed September 3, 2015, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com>.

Wagner, appearing at the turning of a bar.”²⁸ Inevitably, as d’Indy and the Schola promoted the value of Wagner, it became a barrier to Debussy’s exploration of French tradition.

For another angle, as the Schola Cantorum promoted the symphony as a carrier of political meaning, Debussy said that the genre “was essentially Germanic, and especially Viennese.”²⁹ In a preface of *Pour la musique française*, he argued:

Let us recover our liberty, our forms: having invented them for the most part, it is right that we conserve them; there are none more beautiful. Let us no longer exert ourselves in writing symphonies, for which we stretched our muscles without appreciable result.³⁰

Debussy clearly understood that the symphony had been perfected by Germans, especially by Beethoven. As the Scholistes were legalizing Beethoven by emphasizing his Flemish ancestry (his grandfather was Flemish), Debussy tartly announced: “It is a matter of pulling out the weeds without pity, just as a surgeon cuts off a gangrened leg.”³¹

Debussy’s rejection of both Wagnerism and the symphony not only reflected his disagreement with d’Indy’s evaluation of the genre and the composer, but also conveyed his determination to find a “pure” French tradition. As Fulcher describes,

²⁸ François Lesure, “Debussy, Claude,” *Grove Music Online*, accessed September 21, 2015, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com>.

²⁹ *Ibid*, 211.

³⁰ *Ibid*, 210.

³¹ *Ibid*.

[Debussy] was rather turning to the sonata, in its earliest, or still amorphous, state. And as opposed to Germanic conception, he would here reappropriate the genre as “French” by attempting to utilize French thematic material, and thus redefining an appropriate form.³²

³² Ibid., 210.

CHAPTER 3

THE CYCLIC FORM

On the first page of the Sonata for Cello and Piano, Debussy wrote “Musicien Français” under his name.³³ Such an entitled identity can neither be found in Germanic composers’ works, nor in the works of other French composers, and it conveys Debussy’s enthusiasm for emphasizing himself as a French musician. Debussy also specifically titled each movement of his Sonata “Prologue,” “Serenade” and “Finale.” Such titles reveal Debussy’s affection for the French Baroque tradition, for “Prologue” and “Serenade” were often used by French Baroque composers in operas, dramas, and ballets. In the complete list of thirty-one operas by Jean-Philippe Rameau, six opera-ballets contain a prologue as the opening of the work, and the same title is also used for the opening of Rameau’s *tragédies en musique, comédies lyriques, and pastorale heroïque*.³⁴ Jean-Baptiste Lully, a pioneer of the French opera tradition, uses the prologue to open his numerous operas, but introduces the Serenade in his *Ballet des Plaisirs* and the comedy ballet *Monsieur de Pourceaugnac*.³⁵

³³ Claude Debussy. “Sonate pour Violoncelle et Piano” (Paris : Durand, 1915), 1.

³⁴ Graham Sadler and Thomas Christensen, “Rameau, Jean-Philippe,” *Grove Music Online*, s.v., accessed October, 3, 2015, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com>.

³⁵ Sunkyong Hong, “A Stylistic Analysis and Technical Consideration of Debussy’s Sonata for Cello and Piano” (Ann Arbor: UMI Dissertation Service, 2003), 32.

While Debussy had a collection of sonatas in mind, it is possible that the idea of writing a group of six sonatas might have been an imitation of the Baroque tradition. It is also notable that the sonata is not a genre that can be found readily in oeuvres of the composer's past; just two compositions from his earlier work, the *Fantaisie pour piano et orchestre* (1890) and the String Quartet (1894), are in sonata-allegro form.³⁶ When one examines the structure of the Sonata for Cello and Piano, however, one discovers that it is not written in sonata allegro form. Although the Prologue can be divided into three sections—ABA' ternary form—Debussy does not develop any elements from the A section, but repeats the theme of the introduction and presents it as the climax of the Prologue. In fact, in this sonata, the thematic materials unify the entire work. Interestingly, regarding the form, there is a similarity between the Sonata for Cello and Piano and the String Quartet, since Debussy also used the thematic material as a unifying device in the String Quartet. The thematic material in the String Quartet facilitated the work as cyclic sonata form, because the theme of the first movement returns in the Finale, and also appears frequently among the movements.³⁷ As Marianne Wheeldon suggests, when Debussy composed the String Quartet in 1893, he was under the strong influence of Franck, and it reflects much of Franck's string quartet writing in terms of the

³⁶ Marianne Wheeldon, "Debussy and La Sonate Cyclique," *The Journal of Musicology* 22:4 (2005), 645.

³⁷ Wheeldon, 647-648.

relation of the thematic material between each movement.³⁸ Likewise, the thematic material in the Cello Sonata contributes to the unity of the entire sonata; however, because of the infrequent appearance and the various transfigurations of this material undermine the sense of cyclic integrity, they give the work a subtle cyclic form.

The thematic material of the sonata is found in the Prologue's piano introduction at mm. 1-4 (Example 1). The triplet figure in this material reveals Debussy's imitation of French Overture style, since the triplet was a common rhythmic flourish in that time. Debussy may have gleaned aspects of style from Rameau's writing when he edited Rameau's opera-ballet *Les Fêtes de Polymnie* for the *Œuvres complètes* in 1905, since this triplet figure is similar to the opening of *Les Fêtes de Polymnie*³⁹ (Example 2, mm. 1-9).



EXAMPLE 1: Claude Debussy, *Sonate pour Violoncelle et Piano*, Prologue, mm. 1-4. Copyright by Durand & Cie, 1915.

³⁸ Ibid., 649.

³⁹ Ibid., 669.

OUVERTURE

1 Gravement 2 3 4 5 (Cues) 6

FLÛTES

HAUTOIS

BASSONS

TROMPETTES en RÉ

TIMBALES
EÉ-LA

et 2^{es} VIOLONS DE VIOLON
(1^{er} Violon)

HAUTES-CONTRE
(2^{es} Violons)

TAILLES
(Altos)

BASSE CONTINUE
(Hornes, Contrebasses
et Claviers)

PIANO

The image shows a page of a musical score for Jean-Philippe Rameau's *Les Fêtes de Polymnie*, Ouverture, measures 7-9. The score is written for a full orchestra and includes parts for Flute (Fl.), Trumpet (Tromp.), Timpani (Timp.), Viola (Vcllo), Alto (Alt.), Bassoon (B.C.), and Piano (P). The measures are numbered 7, 8, and 9 at the top. The Flute part has a handwritten '(Tous)' above it. The Trumpet part has a handwritten '(Dolce)' above it. The Timpani part has a handwritten '(f)' above it. The Viola part has a handwritten '(mf)' above it. The Alto part has a handwritten '(mf)' above it. The Bassoon part has a handwritten '(mf)' above it. The Piano part has a handwritten '(mf)' above it. The score is in 3/4 time and features a variety of dynamics and articulations.

EXAMPLE 2: Jean-Philippe Rameau, *Les Fêtes de Polymnie*, Ouverture, mm. 1-12.⁴⁰

The ABA' ternary form in the Prologue is as follows: the A section is from m. 1 to m. 15; the B section starts at m. 16 and ends at m. 28; and the last section, A', is from m. 29 to the end of the movement. The thematic material can be found in each section, and it is notable that Debussy links the complete gesture of the material with a heightened musical expressivity. For instance, in the opening of introduction (Example 1, mm.1-4), the complete figuration of the thematic theme is not only presented with *forte* but also with a *tenuto* under each eighth note. With such dramatic dynamics and emphatic

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articulation, he imbues the theme with intense expressivity. Similarly, Debussy also uses the complete theme in the cello line for the arrival of the climax in the B section (Example 3, mm. 29-32), creating an atmosphere for the continuation of the expression in the following measures (Example 3, m. 33 ff.).

The image shows a page of a musical score for Claude Debussy's Sonata for Cello and Piano, "Prologue", measures 29-36. The score is in G major and 3/4 time. It features a cello line and a piano accompaniment. Measure 29 is marked "29" and "au Mouvt (largement déclamé)". The piano part has "molto cresc." and "molto sostenuto" markings. Measure 30 has "8" above the staff. Measure 31 has "7" below the staff. Measure 32 has "8-1" above the staff. Measure 33 has "7" below the staff. The score includes dynamic markings like "f", "mf", "dim.", and "pp", and performance instructions like "pos ord.", "Rubato", and "languido". The word "Cédez" is written above the cello staff in measures 34 and 35.

EXAMPLE 3: Claude Debussy, Sonate pour Violoncelle et Piano, "Prologue," mm. 29-36.

Copyright by Durand & Cie 1915.

The last complete thematic figuration can be found in the A' section (Example 4, mm. 45-46), as the material completely repeats the same gesture of measure 33 in the cello line, but with *pianissimo*, *crescendo*, *decrescendo* and a *poco vibrato* that only appears one time throughout the Prologue. The expressiveness here is portrayed with a special color—the cello's *poco vibrato*—and the subtlety of the dynamic shape in the piano.



EXAMPLE 4: Claude Debussy, Sonate pour Violoncelle et Piano, “Prologue,” mm. 45-46.
Copyright by Durand & Cie 1915.

There are two fragmentary gestures of the thematic material that appear in the B section. First, at mm. 17 and 19, the triplet figure recalls the thematic material from the movement's piano introduction (Example 5).

EXAMPLE 5: Claude Debussy, Sonate pour Violoncelle et Piano, “Prologue,” mm. 16-21. Copyright by Durand & Cie 1915.

It can be suggested that, in the highlighted portions of mm. 17-19, Debussy hints at or prepares for the climatic announcement of the entire theme in the cello at m. 29 (Example 6).



EXAMPLE 6: Claude Debussy, Sonate pour Violoncelle et Piano, “Prologue,” m. 29. Copyright by Durand & Cie 1915.

The other appearance of the fragmented thematic material takes place at m. 34. Here, Debussy continues the phrase with rhythmically augmented eighth-note triplet figures; meanwhile, this extended triplet rhythm releases the intensity of the climatic effect from the previous phrase (Example 3, above, mm. 31-34).

EXAMPLE 7: Claude Debussy, Sonate pour Violoncelle et Piano, “Prologue,” mm. 30-36. Copyright by Durand & Cie 1915.

The restatement of the thematic material in the Finale unifies the sonata into a cyclic form, but Debussy’s approach is unusual. The restatement does not appear until the closure of the movement (Example 8, mm. 114-118), with altered thematic material derived from the climax of the Prologue. It is doubtful that this restatement would be easily recognized by the listener, because its last appearance is 82 measures earlier. This restatement, however, carries no less intensity than its original appearance in the climax of the Prologue. Debussy approaches this restatement with the same dynamic *forte* as he did in the Prologue, and renders it the only unaccompanied cello solo in the entire sonata, announcing the restatement with *largo la moitié plus lent* and *à plein son*. The full sound of the cello couples with the expanded tempo freedom, declaiming the restatement with

great musical intensity. The dramatic effect that the same material delivers in the Prologue is refreshed at the end of the Sonata.

The image shows a musical score for the final section of Claude Debussy's Sonata for Violoncelle et Piano. It consists of two systems of staves. The first system (mm. 114-118) features a Violoncelle staff and a Piano staff. The Violoncelle part begins with a *mf* dynamic and a *molto* tempo marking. The Piano part starts with a *mf* dynamic and a *molto* tempo marking. Both parts progress through measures 114, 115, 116, 117, and 118. The dynamics increase to *ff* and *ff sec* by measure 118. The second system (mm. 115-118) shows the Violoncelle part continuing with a *Largo (la moitié plus lent)* tempo marking and a *à plein son* instruction. The dynamics are *f* and *mf*. The Piano part is mostly silent in this section. The score concludes with a *Rit.* marking and a double bar line.

EXAMPLE 8: Claude Debussy, Sonate pour Violoncelle et Piano, “Finale,” mm. 114-118. Copyright by Durand & Cie 1915.

The image shows a musical score for the Prologue section of Claude Debussy's Sonata for Violoncelle et Piano. It consists of two systems of staves. The first system (mm. 31-32) features a Violoncelle staff and a Piano staff. The Violoncelle part begins with a *f* dynamic and a *molto* tempo marking. The Piano part starts with a *f* dynamic and a *molto* tempo marking. Both parts progress through measures 31 and 32. The dynamics are *f* and *mf*. The score concludes with a double bar line.

EXAMPLE 9: Claude Debussy, Sonate pour Violoncelle et Piano, “Prologue,” mm. 31-32. Copyright by Durand & Cie 1915.

Debussy's strategy of reworking thematic material to achieve a cyclic form can also be found in the closing section of the second movement, the Serenade. Debussy introduces a rhythmic transfiguration of the Prologue's introductory theme in the passage that links the "Serenade" and the "Finale" together (Example 10, mm. 59-64).

EXAMPLE 10: Claude Debussy, Sonate pour Violoncelle et Piano, "Sérénade," mm. 57-64.

Copyright by Durand & Cie 1915.

Debussy starts preparing for the final emergence of the complete theme with this variation of the thematic material, later recalling the same material three times with a slight pitch difference before presenting the complete statement at the end of the "Finale" (Example 11, mm. 49-50; 51-52; Example 12, 104-105). As Debussy recalls this incomplete thematic material, he limits its presentation to the piano, but with an agile *crescendo* and *decrescendo* shape. By doing so, he not only creates dramatic contrast with

the *forte* sovereignty of the complete thematic material at the end of movement, but also increases the tension for the arrival of the full statement. In terms of the spacing of the thematic material, it is interesting to note that in the Finale Debussy pairs the first two appearances of the material together (Example 11, mm. 49-52), but delays the third occurrence until 52 measures later at m. 104 (Example 12).

The image shows a musical score for measures 49-52. The top staff is for the Violoncello (Cello) and the bottom two staves are for the Piano. The key signature has two flats (B-flat and E-flat), and the time signature is 3/4. Measure 49: Cello has a melodic line starting with a half note G4, followed by quarter notes A4, B4, and C5. Piano has a rhythmic accompaniment of eighth notes. Measure 50: Cello has a melodic line starting with a half note D5, followed by quarter notes E5, F5, and G5. Piano continues with eighth notes. Measure 51: Cello has a melodic line starting with a half note G5, followed by quarter notes A5, B5, and C6. Piano continues with eighth notes. Measure 52: Cello has a melodic line starting with a half note D6, followed by quarter notes E6, F6, and G6. Piano continues with eighth notes. The score includes dynamic markings (*p*, *molto*) and performance instructions (*Sempre*).

EXAMPLE 11: Claude Debussy, Sonate pour Violoncelle et Piano, “Finale,” mm. 49-52. Copyright by Durand & Cie 1915.



EXAMPLE 12: Claude Debussy, Sonate pour Violoncelle et Piano, “Finale,” mm. 104-105.

Copyright by Durand & Cie 1915.

With such an unevenly paced arrangement of the thematic segments, one might ask what the composer’s intention was. In looking back to the occurrence of this thematic material at the end of the Serenade, however, Debussy’s pacing of the thematic material becomes clearer. The original structure of the material is a four-measure passage (Example 13, Serenade, mm. 59-62), and by considering its original structure, the recurrence of this material at mm. 49-52 in the Finale can be also suggested as a four-measure passage with chromatic relationship (Example 14).



EXAMPLE 13: Claude Debussy, Sonate pour Violoncelle et Piano, Sérénade, mm. 59-62.

Copyright by Durand & Cie 1915.



EXAMPLE 14: Claude Debussy, Sonate pour Violoncelle et Piano, "Finale," mm. 49-52.

Copyright by Durand & Cie, 1915.

Now, in re-examining the space between each recapitulation of the thematic material, it can be suggested that Debussy has paved a space for the recurrence of the thematic

material each time: the distance between the first appearance of the material at the end of the Serenade and its second appearance in mm. 49-52 of the Finale is 51 measures, and the distance between the second and third appearance is 52 measures (mm. 104-107).

As Debussy deftly constructs the frame of the cyclic form for this sonata, it is interesting to discover that even though he regularly recalls the thematic material to achieve a cyclic form, he does not seem to offer a strong cyclic sense, since he intentionally chooses to use variations of the introductory theme of the Prologue. Debussy's use of cyclic form might be understood as his own political statement: in supporting the idea of reviving French art and rejecting all Germanic elements, his approach to cyclic form is not in keeping with German tradition. Instead, he creates a looseness of cyclic sense in this sonata. As Pierre Boulez described, "[Debussy] distrusts architecture, in the old-fashioned sense of term, and prefers structures that mingle rigor and freedom of choice."⁴¹ In an environment in which political doctrine promoted "authentic French culture," Debussy's treatment of cyclic form in this sonata shows his individual interpretation of that dogma. He subtly distinguishes himself from the traditional cyclic form of the German composers and even of Franck. As he stated after he composed this sonata: "I like its proportions and its form that is almost classical in the good sense of the word

⁴¹ Relevés d'apprenti, Paris, 1966, 35, quoted in Stefan Jarocinski, *Debussy: Impressionism and Symbolism* (London: Ernst Eulenberg Ltd., 1976), 159.

CHAPTER 4

HARMONIC ANALYSIS

Prologue

The harmonic layout for the thematic material in the introduction of the Prologue can be seen as Debussy's homage to the opening of Rameau's Prologue in *Les Fêtes de Polymnie*. In the opening of Rameau's "Prologue," the harmonic progression in D major is I - ii⁴/2 - V⁶/5 - I - IV - V (Example 15).

The image shows a musical score for the Prologue of Debussy's *Les Fêtes de Polymnie*. The score is titled "OUVERTURE" and is marked "Gravement". It features a variety of instruments: FLÛTES, HAUTBOIS, BASSONS, TRUMPETTES en RÉ, TIMBALES RÉ-LA, 1^{re} et 2^{es} VIOLONS DE VIOLON (1^{er} Violons), HAUTES-CONTRE (2^{es} Violons), TAILLES (Altos), BASSE CONTINUE (avec le Clarinetto), and PIANO. The score is divided into six measures, numbered 1 through 6. The harmonic progression is indicated at the bottom of the piano part: I, ii⁴/2, V⁶/5, I, IV, V. The tempo is marked "Gravement" and the dynamics include *mf* and *f*. The score is in D major and 4/2 time.

EXAMPLE 15: Jean-Philippe Rameau, *Les Fêtes de Polymnie*, “Overture,” mm. 1-12.

Because this opera-ballet was composed for the celebration of the French victory at the Battle of Fontenoy in the War of the Austrian Succession, Rameau’s harmonic setting in the opening conveys the celebration of triumph regarding this event.⁴² In comparison to Rameau, Debussy arranges the harmonies in the opening of his Cello Sonata Prologue in D minor with the succession of functional harmonies $i - iv - v$, as he introduces the thematic material (Example 16, mm. 1-2), and then he uses the subdominant and the

⁴²Amanda Holden, *The New Penguin Opera Guide* (New York: Penguin Putnam, 2001), 839.

dominant of C as he continues the phrase (Example 16, mm. 3-4). The successive functional harmonies generate a declamatory-like expression with nobility, which Fulcher describes as “evocative of French Trouvère melodies.”⁴³

Prologue

EXAMPLE 16: Claude Debussy, *Sonate pour Violoncelle et Piano*, “Prologue,” mm. 1-4. Copyright by Durand & Cie 1915.

Debussy’s employment of harmonies in this framework, however, generates great musical intensity. After the establishment of the tonic of D minor at the opening (m. 1), the use of the ninth of the subdominant not only recalls the same major third of the tonic in the upper voice, but also successfully extends the tension through the suspension of the tonic (Example 17, m. 2).

⁴³ Fulcher, “Speaking the Truth to Power”, 226. period

EXAMPLE 17: Claude Debussy, Sonate pour Violoncelle et Piano, “Prologue,” mm. 1-2. Copyright by Durand & Cie 1915.

As Debussy reaffirms the tonic at m. 3, he also drops the bass line an octave lower, and this widened space between the outer voices stresses the color shift from the tonal center D to C. The motion of the subdominant of C strengthens the intensive effect with its contra-motion between the bass and the soprano, and lends power to the moment when it moves to the dominant of C at m. 4 (Example 18, mm.3-4).

EXAMPLE 18: Claude Debussy, Sonate pour Violoncelle et Piano, “Prologue,” mm. 3-4. Copyright by Durand & Cie 1915.

In conjunction with the restatements of the principal theme throughout the Prologue, Debussy modifies Rameau's harmonic progression in various ways. At the climax of the B section at mm. 29-34, Debussy skillfully transforms the intervallic relationship within the harmonic progression (i-ii-V-I) into a series of changes of the tonal center. Starting with C at m. 29, Debussy then moves to D minor at m. 31. At m. 34, the tonality of G is implied at the closure of the climactic moment. It is worth noting here that the G in the cello line is elongated to the next measure. This continuation of the G is supported by the C in the piano at the beginning of the transition to the A' section give measure number, while the F and C sharp in the piano resemble the ending of the chromatic scale in the proceeding measure (Example 19).

29

pou ord.

f molto sostenuto

f molto cresc.

mf

pp

Accending Pentatonic scale

30 31 32 33

f *mf* *f* *mf* *dim.*

Chromatic Scale

34 Cédéz - - - - - *p*

pp *mf* *pp*

mf *pp*

pp

D 35 36

mf *pp*

pp

G C

EXAMPLE 19: Claude Debussy, Sonate pour Violoncelle et Piano, “Prologue,” mm. 27-36.

Copyright by Durand & Cie 1915.

The process of changing tonal center here reflects the same intervallic relationship within Rameau’s harmonic progression: I-ii-V. The use of the harmonic progression at the opening of the Prologue lends it greater musical intensity; however, as Debussy later transforms this progression into a series of tonal shifts, it does not promote the accumulation of such intensity. Instead, it resolves musical tension. While Debussy

presents the thematic material in tonal center C to celebrate the arrival of the climax (m. 29), he also writes an ascending pentatonic scale on C in the piano part to create musical intensity. As he continues to develop this melody in D toward a climax, however, he displays the melody in descending motion (m. 30). With the contrasting tonal colors moving from C to D, Debussy still keeps fragments of the pentatonic scale in the piano and maintains the dynamic level throughout. The brightness of the climax is subtly dimmed in m. 33: Debussy's deft use of the chromatic scale not only forms a clear contrast with the pentatonic scale in the earlier passage (m. 29), but also smoothly decreases the intensity of the climax. After the last announcement of the thematic material in G major presented in *piano* and *decrescendo*, the intensity of the climax fully recedes (Example 19, m. 34).

The last appearance of the thematic material in the Prologue is in the original tonic of D. Debussy uses the melody here to close the movement and does not arrange it into a four-bar phrase. Keeping in the use of functional harmonies from tonic to subdominant, the movement closes with a repetition of the triplet motive from the primary thematic material.

Debussy's use of harmonies in the Prologue results in an interesting effect: even though he uses functional harmonies, the music does not present a clear sense of major or minor, yet one can still hear a clear tonal center. Such a compositional style has been recognized as Debussy's trademark in most of his works. In the context of the musical

world of wartime France, however, Debussy's treatment of harmony may be understood as his negotiation of the prevailing political dogma. His use of non-Western scales clearly promotes the political idea of an anti-German sound, and his approach of using functional harmonies but avoiding the clarity of major and minor tonality suggests his solution to the problem of harmony as a Musicien Français.

Serenade

The Serenade exhibits the greatest spontaneity of the Sonata. The debate about Debussy naming the Sonata “Pierrot fâché avec la lune” (“Pierrot Angry at the Moon”) was probably instigated by the cellist Louis Rossor.⁴⁴ In his recital program notes, Rossor indicated that he received the following description of the piece from Debussy:

Pierrot wakes up with a start and shakes off his stupor. He rushes off to sing a serenade to his beloved who, despite his supplications, remains unmoved. To comfort himself in his failure he sings a song of liberty.⁴⁵

Conversely, in a letter that Debussy sent to Jacques Durand on October 16, 1916, he writes that after Rossor’s visit he was very angry that his music was completely misunderstood by this cellist.⁴⁶ More interestingly, the author Léon Vallas, a friend of Debussy, stated: “We are told that [Debussy] had thought of calling it ‘Pierrot fâché avec la lune,’ and wished to evoke characters from the old Italian comedy.”⁴⁷ Since there is no further evidence to prove if Debussy dropped the title due to Rossor’s personal interpretation, the title “Pierrot fâché avec la lune” cannot be considered verifiably

⁴⁴ There is no specific resource to corroborate Louis Rossor’s claim.

⁴⁵ François Lesure, *Debussy Sonate Violoncello und Klavier*, “Preface” (München: G. Henle, 1998).

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Léon Vallas, *Claude Debussy: His Life and Works*, translated by Maire and Grace O’Brien (London: Oxford University, 1933 and New York: Dover, 1973), 55.

factual. It is worth noting that Debussy did portray the Pierrot character many times in his early works, particularly in his songs.

Debussy titled his first art song from 1881, “Pierrot.” It is based on a poem by Théodore de Banville. The character is also present in Debussy’s *Pantomime* (1882), based on poems by Paul Verlaine.⁴⁸ These songs reveal Debussy’s change in perception toward the character of Pierrot. In his song “Pierrot”, Debussy mainly depicted a famous figure, the Pierrot actor Jean Gaspard Debureau, as described in the texts.⁴⁹ In his song *Pantomime*, the character of Pierrot is put behind a veil. Debussy commentator Wilfrid Mellers perceives him as a contemplative and masked Pierrot.⁵⁰ The most striking description of Pierrot’s identity is that of Debussy scholar Jane Fulcher. She believes that Debussy may have personally identified with the figure of Pierrot in his Cello Sonata because, for French artists in the eighteenth century, Pierrot was a symbol of a man’s dissatisfaction with his own desires.⁵¹ Regardless of whether the Sonata portrays Pierrot’s sad mood, the harmonies that Debussy uses in the Serenade are of a spontaneous character that may suggest a Pierrot-like image.

⁴⁸Sunkyoung Hong, “A Stylistic Analysis and Technical Consideration of Debussy’s Sonata for Cello and Piano” (Ann Arbor: UMI Dissertation Service, 2003), 13.

⁴⁹ Graham Johnson and Richard Stokes, *A French Song Companion* (Oxford University Press, 2000), 94. Italicize title, not quotation marks

⁵⁰ Wilfrid Mellers, “The Final Works of Claude Debussy or Pierrot Fâché avec la Lune”, *Studies in Contemporary Music* (London: Dennis Dobson Ltd., 1947), 55. Fix this citation. If *Studies in Contemporary Music* is a book title, italicize it.

⁵¹ Fulcher, ed. *Debussy and His World*, 222.

Debussy evokes spontaneity in the Serenade through his use of tritones and perfect fifths. Debussy does not use straightforward tonal harmonies; instead, he emphasizes intervallic effects. Tritones and perfect fifths are the two most prevalent intervals in the structure of harmonies and melodies in this movement. Because tritone relationships generate dissonance, they promote great instability. The consonant perfect fifth, in contrast, often resolves the instability of tritones and clarifies the tonality. As Robert Moevs states in his essay, “Intervallic Procedures in Debussy”: “When totality breaks down, intervals play an increasingly central role, and that the intervallic procedure is ultimately one that may contradict tonal precepts.”⁵² Instead of using traditional tonality, Debussy emphasizes intervallic relationships through tritones and perfect fifths to create a spontaneous contrast between those two intervals. This is the dominant feature in the Serenade.

Based on the relationship between tritones and perfect fifths, the Serenade can be divided into three sections: A, B, and A'. The A section extends from m. 1 to m. 30, and the B section from m. 31 to m. 53; the last section, A', starts at m. 54, and closes at m. 64 with an *attacca* that connects to the Finale. Noticeably, each of the first two sections of the Serenade also contains multiple small sections. The A section comprises four small

⁵² Robert Moevs, “Intervallic Procedures in Debussy: ‘Serenade’ from the Sonata for Cello and Piano,” *Perspectives of New Music* 8 (1969), 82–101. Only give the page number of the quote, not of the whole article.

subsections that includes a transition, and the B section includes three subsections that are through-composed.

Through a rising chromatic line, Debussy conceals the tritone relationship between the last note of the Prologue and the first note of the Serenade (the D and A-flat form a tritone), which also can be seen as a foreshadowing of the dissonance and instability of this movement (Example 20, 21).



EXAMPLE 20: Claude Debussy, *Sonate pour Violoncelle et Piano*, Prologue, m. 51. Copyright by Durand & Cie 1915.



EXAMPLE 21: Claude Debussy, Sonate pour Violoncelle et Piano, Sérénade, m. 1.
Copyright by Durand & Cie 1915.

As the movement opens with the contrast between a semitone and whole-tone effect (Example 22, mm. 1-2), the intervallic procedure is gradually expanded to embrace a tritone (Example 22, mm. 3-4).



EXAMPLE 22: Claude Debussy, Sonate pour Violoncelle et Piano, “Sérénade,” mm. 1-4.
Copyright by Durand & Cie, 1915.

The successive uses of the tritone increase the obscurity of the movement’s tonality (m. 4), and also promote a trend toward a clarification of the tonal center. The arrival of the

perfect fifth of G to D on the downbeat of the next measure reduces the faintness of the tonality, implying G as the tonal center (Example 23, m. 5). However, because Debussy creates a D-minor diatonic scale with a chromatic emphasis in the melodic line later in m. 5, he weakens the clarity of the tonal center of G, and does not form a dramatic contrast with the unstable effect of the tritones from the previous passage. Only when Debussy combines a pentatonic scale in the cello with the successive use of perfect fifths in the piano harmony does he illuminate a new color to stress a contrast with the foregoing tritone passage (Example 23, m. 7).

The image shows a musical score for three staves: Violin (top), Cello (middle), and Piano (bottom). The score is in G minor and 3/4 time. The first staff (Violin) has a *p* dynamic and the instruction *sempre pizz.* (pizzicato). The second staff (Cello) has a *p* dynamic. The third staff (Piano) has dynamics of *pp* and *sf*. A box labeled "Pentatonic Scale" highlights a passage in the Cello part. A label "perfect fifths" points to a sequence of chords in the Piano part.

EXAMPLE 23: Claude Debussy, *Sonate pour Violoncelle et Piano*, “Sérénade,” mm. 5-7. Copyright by Durand & Cie, 1915.

The root of the G-minor-triad-based ninth chord at the end of m. 7 insinuates the subdominant function of D minor (Example 24); with the A major seventh and D minor seventh chords in the cello and piano parts, this harmonic constellation raises the question

of whether a subdominant, dominant and tonic relationship are suggested by the composer (Example 24, mm. 7-8).

G minor 9 A major 7 D minor 7

EXAMPLE 24: Claude Debussy, *Sonate pour Violoncelle et Piano, Sérénade*, mm. 7-8. Copyright by Durand & Cie, 1915.

The harmonies of mm. 7-8 are all rooted in perfect fifths; however, since they are constructed on the mediant degree and the bass relationship between each harmony surprisingly features a tritone relationship, the progression does not reflect D minor straightforwardly. Instead, the consonant color of the perfect fifth is highlighted. When the same harmonies are repeated at m. 9, Debussy rearranges them as tonic chords with an emphasis on the tonic root, momentarily suggesting D minor as the tonal center, while also forming a tritone relationship with A-flat in the next measure (Example 25, mm. 9-10). The D and A-flat tritone relationship here recalls the same intervallic feature that occurs between the end of the Prologue and the beginning of the Serenade, and makes the entry of the tritone chord that is constructed with the same pitches very subtle (m. 10).

The image shows a musical score for measures 9 and 10. The top staff is for the cello, marked 'arco' and 'pizz.' with dynamics 'p' and 'pp'. The bottom two staves are for the piano, with dynamics 'p' and 'pp'. A tritone interval is explicitly labeled in the piano part at the beginning of measure 10.

EXAMPLE 25: Claude Debussy, *Sonate pour Violoncelle et Piano, Sérénade*, mm. 9-10. Copyright by Durand & Cie, 1915.

The tritone relationship between D and A-flat at the beginning of the second section of the Serenade (Example 26, mm. 10-11) can also be considered a foreshadowing of the intervallic structure of section two, because the tritone is the prime interval in that section (mm. 10-17). While Debussy continues the phrase with a whole-tone scale, he places emphasis on the tritone interval of G-sharp and D on the downbeat and it completely obscures the whole-tone scale effect (Example 27, mm. 12-16.)



EXAMPLE 26: Claude Debussy, Sonate pour Violoncelle et Piano, “Sérénade,” mm. 10-11.

Copyright by Durand & Cie, 1915.



EXAMPLE 27: Claude Debussy, Sonate pour Violoncelle et Piano, “Sérénade,” mm. 12-16.

Copyright by Durand & Cie, 1915.

As section two ends on a C-major triad emphasizing the C-G perfect fifth at m. 18, the sudden consonance of this chord clears up the instability of the tritone effect, and

promptly generates a dramatic contrast with the dissonance of tritone (Example 28, m. 18).



EXAMPLE 28: Claude Debussy, Sonate pour Violoncelle et Piano, Sérénade, m. 18. Copyright by Durand & Cie, 1915.

The alternation between the tritone and perfect fifth in section three becomes more frequent in the harmony and melody, and the contrast between those two intervals creates a highly chromatic effect in the piano bass line (Example 29, mm. 23-24); with the chromatic writing of the melody, it creates a sense of anxiety or urgency. The use of the G dominant seventh chord, however, suddenly interrupts the urgency created by the tritone and forms a spontaneous contrast with the D minor scale in the cello line at the end of section three (Example 29, m. 25).

23 24 25

Cédez // *Cédez //* *Fuoco* *Cédez*

p *mf* *f* *Alto* *f* *3*

Cédez // *Cédez //* *Fuoco* *Cédez*

p *p* *sfz*

G dominant 7

EXAMPLE 29: Claude Debussy, Sonate pour Violoncelle et Piano, “Sérénade,” mm. 23-25.

Copyright by Durand & Cie, 1915.

The transition starts with the same tritone material found in the beginning of section two (Example 30, m. 26). The tritone and perfect fifth relationship plays a major role in this section. The contrast between those two intervals can be found in the unfolding harmonic structure of B diminished seventh, B dominant seventh, and B-flat dominant seventh (Example 30, mm. 28-29). Even though the B pedal in the bass of the piano forms a perfect fifth with F sharp, the F sharp also creates a tritone with C in the chord. The consonant perfect fifth is thus blurred, a departure from its treatment in previous sections (Example 30, m. 29). The instability of the dissonance lasts to the end of the transition (Example 30, m. 30).

26 Mouvt
pp

27 Cédez . . d Mouvt
alco

28 Cédez . . // Mouvt
pp très serré
B diminished 7 dominant 7

29 Accel. poco a poco
cresc. 3 . . . 3 . . . scen . . . do f
dim. p 3 5

30 Accel. poco a poco
cresc. 3 . . . 3 . . . scen . . . do sfs
Molto rit. . //

B-flat dominant 7 perfect fifth

EXAMPLE 30: Claude Debussy, *Sonate pour Violoncelle et Piano, Sérénade*, mm. 26-30. Copyright by Durand & Cie, 1915.

The opening of the B section continues to emphasize the tritone relationship in the piano writing (Example 31, mm. 31-34). The B-F tritone can be found in the bass as well as in the structure of the B diminished seventh chord. Because Debussy switches from 4/4 to a 3/8 meter in the B section, he suggests a dance-like mood marked with much lightness, which relieves tension from the dissonant tritone structure in the piano accompaniment.

5

Vivace (la. du Mouvt précédent)

pp leggierissimo

Vivace (la. du Mouvt précédent)

pp

Tritone

Tritone

EXAMPLE 31: Claude Debussy, *Sonate pour Violoncelle et Piano*, “Sérénade,” mm. 31-34.

Copyright by Durand & Cie, 1915.

The bass line changes to the perfect fifth relationship of E and B, joining a G-sharp major seventh chord which evokes the dominant of A major (Example 32, mm. 35-36).

However, since this harmony only stays for two measures, this temporary tonal clarity is quickly interrupted by the entry of section two and its chromatic chord progression, centered on a C major triad (Example 32, mm. 37-40).

31 32 33 34 35 36

5

Vivace (la. 2. du Mouvt précédent)

pp leggerissimo

Vivace (la. 2. du Mouvt précédent)

pp

A dominant 7

37 38 39 40

Meno mosso poco

pp subito

Meno mosso poco

pp subito, leggiero

perfect fifth

C major triad

EXAMPLE 32: Claude Debussy, Sonate pour Violoncelle et Piano, Sérénade, mm. 31-41. Copyright by Durand & Cie, 1915.

The perfect fifth-rooted D major seventh chord at m. 42 suddenly stops the chromatic chord progression along with the instability of the transition and brings back the diatonic scale of A major in the cello melody. This removes the tension stemming from the foregoing dissonance (Example 33).



EXAMPLE 33: Claude Debussy, Sonate pour Violoncelle et Piano, Sérénade, m. 42.

Copyright by Durand & Cie, 1915

The tritone relationship is recalled in the melodic and harmonic structure of section three of the B section (mm. 44-47). The melody is actually derived from the motive of the transition (Example 34, m. 28), but Debussy conceals a B and F tritone relationship as he develops the motive into a melody (Example 35, mm. 44-45). G sharp and D form the tritone in the chord structure, but with the whole-tone relationship in the outer voices, the sharpness of the dissonance is diminished.



EXAMPLE 34: Claude Debussy, Sonate pour Violoncelle et Piano, “Sérénade,” m. 28.

Copyright by Durand & Cie, 1915.

The image shows a musical score for three measures, numbered 44, 45, and 46. The top staff is for the Cello, and the bottom two staves are for the Piano. Measure 44 is marked with a double bar line and the word 'Rubato'. Below the staff, it says 'sur la touche'. Measure 45 is also marked 'Rubato'. Measure 46 is marked 'piu p'. The piano part consists of chords and single notes, with some notes marked with a 'p' for piano.

Fix clefs and key signatures in the example.

EXAMPLE 35: Claude Debussy, Sonate pour Violoncelle et Piano, “Sérénade,” mm. 44-45.

Copyright by Durand & Cie, 1915.

As Debussy continues the phrase with the A-E perfect fifth in the bass line (Example 36, mm. 48-51), he also uses a chromatic scale in the piano’s treble clef to present the cello melody in a tritone relationship. The consonance in the bass line is blurred by the strong dissonance created through chromaticism and tritones. Strikingly, as Debussy consistently repeats a chain of perfect fifths with *pizzicato* cello (A-D-G-C), he creates the most dramatic contrast through dissonance (Example 36, m. 49 and m. 51). The clarity of the *pizzicato* articulation and the repetition inevitably stresses a distinction between the perfect fifth and tritone at the end of the B section.

48 49 50 51

Presque lent
Flautendo...
pp 3

Flautendo...
arco
pp 3

Presque lent
p dolce
pp
p
pp

Perfect fifth
Perfect fifth

EXAMPLE 36: Claude Debussy, Sonate pour Violoncelle et Piano, Sérénade, mm. 47-51. Copyright by Durand & Cie, 1915.

Debussy initiates the last section of the movement with the same melody as the opening section (Example 38, mm. 54-55). Instead of using a perfect fifth on G as in the A section (Example 37, m. 5), he uses an F sharp to form a tritone relationship with the C of the previous measure and to create dissonant tension followed by tritone-based harmonies (Example 38, m. 55-56).

5

p
sempre pizz.

p
pp

EXAMPLE 37: Claude Debussy, Sonate pour Violoncelle et Piano, Sérénade, m. 5.
Copyright by Durand & Cie, 1915.

The image shows a musical score for three measures (54, 55, and 56) from Claude Debussy's 'Sérénade'. The score is written for Violoncelle and Piano. Measure 54 is marked '1er Mouvt' and 'ten.'. Measure 55 is marked '1er Mouvt' and 'pp'. Measure 56 is marked 'arco' and 'sur la touche'. The score includes dynamic markings like 'f vibrato', 'pp', and 'p', and a 'tritone' label under a chord in measure 56.

EXAMPLE 38: Claude Debussy, Sonate pour Violoncelle et Piano, "Sérénade," mm. 52-56.
Copyright by Durand & Cie, 1915.

The A dominant seventh chord in the next measure is the only clear tonal harmony in the Serenade that defines the tonic of D minor (Example 39, m. 57). At the close of the movement, the A natural is placed as the pedal point to suggest the dominant degree of D minor (Example 39, mm. 59-64). The eighth-note figuration presents a colorful alternation of tritones and perfect fifths with the A pedal point: the E flat forms a tritone and the E creates a perfect fifth with A (Example 39, mm. 61-64).

57 58 59 60

più p *pp stretto e cresc. molto* *au Mouvt*

pp *stretto e cresc. molto* *pp*

A dominant 7 *Tritone*

61 62 63 64

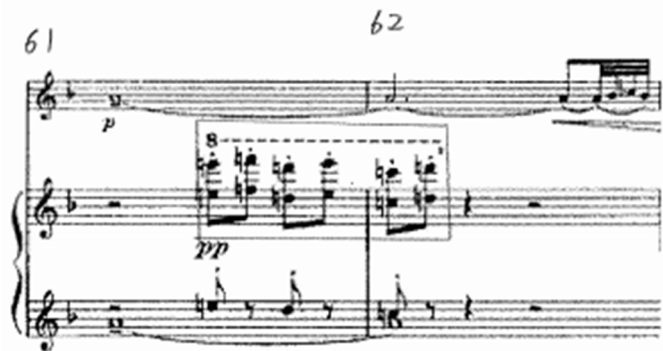
p *pp* *p* *pp* *pp*

perfect fifth *pp* *pp* *pp* *pp*

allora subito il Finale

EXAMPLE 39: Claude Debussy, Sonate pour Violoncelle et Piano, “Sérénade,” mm. 57-64. Copyright by Durand & Cie, 1915.

At the close of the movement, Debussy uses the tritone relationship of A and E flat. The melody marked by eighth notes at mm. 61-62 initiates the Sonata’s Finale movement in the piano part (Example 40). Only then does Debussy emphasize the perfect fifth relationship (Example 41, mm. 1-2).



EXAMPLE 40: Claude Debussy, Sonate pour Violoncelle et Piano, Sérénade, mm. 61-62.
Copyright by Durand & Cie, 1915.



EXAMPLE 41: Claude Debussy, Sonate pour Violoncelle et Piano, Finale, mm. 1-2.
Copyright by Durand & Cie, 1915.

Debussy's strategy of using tritones and perfect fifths not only lightens the sharp contrast between the two intervals, but also reflects his interest in discovering a new approach to composition. He contradicts conventional uses of tonality, stresses intervallic color, and shapes the music in new and dynamic ways. As Fulcher suggests, Debussy

could have identified himself with Pierrot as his predecessors in France did in the eighteenth century. Debussy does not depict a lamenting Pierrot in the Serenade, however; instead, it is the image of a vivid and dramatic Pierrot throughout the movement. The dissatisfaction with man's own desire that Pierrot represented to eighteenth-century audiences may have signified invention and non-conformism to Debussy; the Pierrot character may be seen as one who does not show dissatisfaction, but breaks the restraints of tradition. Debussy, perhaps, was not fully aware that even though he disagreed with the estimation of Wagner that d'Indy's political dogma promoted, his profound use of tritones in the "Serenade" inevitably reveals a Wagnerian influence. After all, Wagner employed the tritone heavily in his works, and it is a signature interval of his "Tristan chord." As someone who had hoped to erase Wagnerian traits in his compositions, seeking a "pure" French musical language, Debussy's embrace of a Wagnerian trademark may have been unexpected. As Fulcher observes, "the irony was unmistakable and arid."⁵³

⁵³ Fulcher, "Speaking the Truth to Power," 223.

Finale

Debussy's harmonic writing in the Finale is very free. The movement is in sonata-rondo form. However, the tonal relationship between each refrain does not reflect the composer's desire to adhere to tradition. As Boulez stated, "With [Debussy], those words, those keys with which are saturated in our schools and academies have no meaning or mental categories of a worn-out tradition could never be applied to his works, even if we tried to adjust them by twisting them here and there."⁵⁴ While diatonic and tonality-affirming harmonies can occasionally be found in the Finale, Debussy often uses modes, whole-tone and pentatonic scales in the melodies and in the transitions from one section to another. He also stresses the fifth scale degree as one of the prevalent features in this movement. With Debussy's free utilization of triads, tritones, perfect fifths, and mode mixture, he accentuates the richness of non-Western and archaic musical elements integrated into the frame of the Finale's tonality.

The Finale is divided into three sections with a transition (A, A-1, transition, and A-2); each section also includes three subsections. The A section lasts from m. 1 to m. 36 (refrain: mm. 1-14; subsection 1: mm. 15-22; subsection 2: mm. 23-37), and the A-1 section is from m. 37 to m. 68 (refrain: mm. 37-44; subsection 1: mm. 45-56; subsection 2: mm. 57-68). The transition takes place from mm. 69-84. The recapitulation section (the

54

A-2 section) is from m. 85 to m. 114 (refrain: mm. 85-95; subsection 1: mm. 96-103; subsection 2: mm. 104-114). It is followed by a coda at m. 115.

Debussy opens the Finale with continuous sextuplet figuration in the piano. The rhythmic character of this figuration contributes a restless energy to the movement, which also corresponds with Debussy's description as *animé* and *léger et nerveux*. Debussy emphasizes the tonal center of the A section through the fifth scale degree of the tonality, which is a prominent technique in the Finale. The refrain of the A section centers on A natural, the dominant of D (Example 42), which appears in the bass of the piano as a pedal (mm. 3-7). While Debussy uses a melody in A-Dorian, he presents it within the fifth relationship A-E (Example 42, mm. 7-14). This emphasis on the fifth degree in the tonal and melodic structure disintegrates the centrality of D, and promotes an unsettled, forward-moving harmonic tendency that is resolved by the arrival of a D-pentatonic phrase in the first subsection of A at m. 15 (Example 42).

The image shows a musical score for the 'Finale' of a piece, marked 'Animé (92 = ♩) Léger et nerveux'. It consists of two staves: a piano part and a violin part. The piano part features a continuous sextuplet figuration in the right hand, starting with a 'pizz.' (pizzicato) marking and a 'p' (piano) dynamic. The violin part has a melody in the right hand, starting with an 'arco' (arco) marking and a 'p' dynamic. The score is divided into four measures, numbered 1 through 4. The piano part has a bass line that includes a pedal point on A natural. The violin part has a melody that is primarily in A-Dorian mode.

5 6 7 8

p *expressif et soutenu*

9 10 11 12

p *marque* *p* *marque*

13 14 15

p *cresc. molto* *f* *p* *volubile*

Molto rit. *// au Mouvt*

Molto rit. *// au Mouvt*

p *cresc. molto* *f* *p*

EXAMPLE 42: Claude Debussy, Sonate pour Violoncelle et Piano, Finale, mm. 1-15. Copyright by Durand & Cie, 1915.

Debussy constructs the D-pentatonic melody with an added third degree, F-sharp, but shapes the melody by emphasizing the second degree, E, of the pentatonic scale (mm. 15-18). As the harmonies in the piano settle on D major, alternating between tonic and

subdominant, the tonal clarity generates freshness and excitement in the E-centered D-pentatonic melody (Example 43, mm. 15-18).

The image shows a musical score for Example 43, consisting of three systems of staves. The first system covers measures 15 and 16. The second system covers measures 17 and 18. The score includes handwritten annotations: 'pentatonic melody' written above the first staff in measures 15-16, and 'tonic subdominant tonic subdominant' written below the piano accompaniment in measures 15-18. Performance markings include 'Molto rit.', 'p cresc. molto', 'f', 'p volubite', and 'pizz.'.

EXAMPLE 43: Claude Debussy, Sonate pour Violoncelle et Piano, Finale, mm. 13-20. Copyright by Durand & Cie, 1915.

As the pianist finishes its echo of the pentatonic melody in m. 21, the E is sustained and pivots to become the tonic of E-Dorian (Example 44, mm. 21-22). It immediately creates a subtle transition for the arrival of the next section in F-sharp minor, since E-Dorian bridges a whole-tone intervallic relationship between D major and F-sharp minor (Example 44, mm. 21-23).

The image shows a musical score for measures 21-23. The top staff is for the cello, starting with a *p* dynamic. The middle and bottom staves are for the piano. The piano part features arpeggiated chords in the left hand and sustained chords in the right hand. The score is marked with **Rubato** and *p dolce sostenuto*. The key signature is E-dorian, and the final chord is F-sharp minor.

EXAMPLE 44: Claude Debussy, *Sonate pour Violoncelle et Piano, Finale*, mm. 21-23. Copyright by Durand & Cie, 1915.

In subsection 2, the piano stresses C sharp as the dominant of F-sharp minor, and the cello produces an impressive color contrast between arpeggios of C-sharp dominant seventh and B diminished seventh chords (Example 45, mm. 23-26). This refined color contrast is achieved by Debussy's presentation of a semitone relationship in the bass structure, as C sharp and G sharp are lifted up to D and A in the cello (mm. 23-26).

The image displays two systems of musical notation for measures 23-24 and 25-26. Each system consists of three staves: a cello staff (bass clef), a piano right-hand staff (treble clef), and a piano left-hand staff (bass clef). Handwritten annotations above the staves identify the chords: 'C-sharp dominant 7' for measures 23-24 and 'B diminish 7' for measures 25-26. Performance markings include 'Rubato' in bold, 'p dolce sostenuto' in italics, and 'p marque' in italics. The piano right-hand part features a melodic line with slurs and accents, while the piano left-hand part provides harmonic support with chords and a bass line. The cello part is also marked with 'Rubato' and 'p dolce sostenuto'.

EXAMPLE 45: Claude Debussy, Sonate pour Violoncelle et Piano, “Finale,” mm. 23-26. Copyright by Durand & Cie, 1915.

The following right-hand piano melody is formed with an added semitone (C natural), and the left hand fills in a tritone frame of F and B that reflects the same intervallic relationship in the structure of the half-diminished seventh chord of the cello (Example 46, m. 27-28). As Debussy derives the F natural from the F-B tritone to initiate the C major diatonic scale in the piano, he smoothens the tritone-based tension that exists

between F-sharp minor and C major, but highlights the bright color of C major (Example 46, mm. 26-28). This section's subtle color changes may be seen to exemplify Debussy's understanding of the "French tradition." In a November 1912 article that Debussy wrote about Rameau, he enthused: "Rameau's major contribution to music was that he knew how to find 'sensibility' within the harmony itself; and that he succeeded in capturing effect of color and certain nuances that, before his time, musicians had not clearly understood."⁵⁵



EXAMPLE 46: Claude Debussy, *Sonate pour Violoncelle et Piano, Finale*, mm. 25-28. Copyright by Durand & Cie, 1915.

Notably, the tritone relationship relates to the spontaneity in the *Serenade* but does not share the same harmonic character in the tonal structure of the *Finale*; rather, it is merely used for color contrast.

⁵⁵ Claude Debussy, *Debussy on Music: The Critical Writing of The Great French Composer Claude Debussy*, collected and introduced by Francois Lesure, translated and edited by Richard Langham Smith (City of Publication: Cornell University Press, 1977), 250.

Debussy builds the refrain of the A-1 section with the same emphasis on the fifth degree in the tonal and melodic structure as he did in section A. Contrastingly, he does not follow the same approach to tonal center in subsection 1 of the A 1-section. As the melody implies C minor, the harmonies in the piano alternate between the dominants of C minor and A-flat major, which blurs the tonal clarity of C minor (Example 47, mm. 45-48).

45 46 47 48

8 Con fuoco ed appassionato

p *piu p*

p *piu p* *p*

C dominant A-flat dominant

EXAMPLE 47: Claude Debussy, *Sonate pour Violoncelle et Piano, Finale*, mm. 45-48. Copyright by Durand & Cie, 1915.

The unclear tonality of this subsection, therefore, not only forms a contrast with the tonal clarity of the refrain, but also may be considered a preparation for the arrival of subsection 2, which is in a highly chromatic style. The E-flat dominant seventh chord at the closure of subsection 1 diatonically resolves into an A-flat triad pedal in subsection 2,

yet the chromatic character of the cello's melody at m. 57 veils this harmonic effect (Example 48, mm. 56-57).

56

E-flat dominant

9 Lento. Molto rubato con
PP dolcissimo ma sostenuto

Lento. Molto rubato

pp molto dolce, lusinga.

A-flat triad

EXAMPLE 48: Claude Debussy, Sonate pour Violoncelle et Piano, Finale, mm. 56-57. Copyright by Durand & Cie, 1915.

As subsection 2 settles on the A-flat major triad as its tonal center, the key signature of D-flat implies that Debussy uses the same approach emphasizing the fifth degree. Because Debussy unrestrainedly uses major triads of G-flat, F, D and G in the treble clef of the piano (Example 51, mm. 57-60), as well as a chromatic melody alternating between cello

and piano (Example 51, m. 57; m. 63), subsection 2 displays a colorful harmonic contrast with the stable A-flat major triad pedal, and also reveals an absence of goal directedness (Example 49, mm. 57-68).

57 chromatic 58 59 60 61

Lento. Molto rubato non morbidezza
pp dolcissimo ma sostenuto
Lento. Molto rubato
pp molto dolce, lusingando

62 chromatic 63 chromatic 64 65 66

pp dolcissimo dolce vibrato pp più pp

67

estinto

EXAMPLE 49: Claude Debussy, Sonate pour Violoncelle et Piano, Finale, mm. 57-68. Copyright by Durand & Cie, 1915

In the cello melody of the transitional section, Debussy underlines the perfect fifth relationship (Example 50, mm. 69-75) and the A-pentatonic scale (Example 52, mm. 75-78). *Staccato* is the prevalent articulation in this section as is the constant sextuplet rhythmic figuration. The perfect fifths and pentatonic scales are presented vividly with energy. This pattern continues until the recapitulation at m. 85.

The image displays a musical score for Example 50, consisting of three systems of staves. The first system (measures 69-71) shows the cello part with a sextuplet and piano accompaniment. Handwritten annotations include 'A-pentatonic scale' above measure 71 and 'perfect fifth' between measures 70 and 71. The second system (measures 72-76) continues the sextuplet in the cello and piano accompaniment. Handwritten annotations include 'A-pentatonic scale' above measure 75 and 'perfect fifth' between measures 74 and 75. The third system (measures 77-80) features a sextuplet in the cello and piano accompaniment. Handwritten annotations include 'A-pentatonic scale' above measure 78 and 'perfect fifth' between measures 77 and 78. Performance instructions include '1er Mouvt sur la touche', 'pp', 'poco marcato', 'crescendo', and 'Pos. ori.'

EXAMPLE 50: Claude Debussy, Sonate pour Violoncelle et Piano, “Finale,” mm. 69-80. Copyright by Durand & Cie, 1915.

Debussy's strategy in the A-3 section reflects a preparation for the arrival of the climax. In the repeat of the pentatonic melody at subsection 1, Debussy transposes the D-pentatonic scale centered on E (the cello line) up a half step (in the treble clef of the piano), which is centered on F (Example 51, mm. 100-103). He stresses G as the tonal center of subsection 2. In subsections 1 and 2 of A-3, he successfully forms the diatonic intervallic relationship E-F-G (Example 51, mm. 96-105).

96 97

Molto rit. - - - Allegro Mouvt

Molto rit. - - - Allegro Mouvt

98 99 100 101

102 103 104 105

Appassionato ed animando

Appassionato ed animando

EXAMPLE 51: Claude Debussy, Sonate pour Violoncelle et Piano, Finale, mm. 94-105. Copyright by Durand & Cie, 1915.

Emphasizing A natural in the piano bass as the dominant of D minor, the climax of the Finale is celebrated with an alternation between the tonic ninth chord and the subdominant (Example 52, mm. 112-114).

The last full statement of the thematic material of the Prologue initiates the brief coda, and with three preparatory D tonic eleventh chords, the Finale cadences on the D-minor triad, stressing the tonic octave (Example 52, mm. 120-123).

EXAMPLE 52: Claude Debussy, *Sonate pour Violoncelle et Piano*, “Finale,” mm. 112-123.

Copyright by Durand & Cie, 1915.

While Debussy sought the French tradition as a response to the political dogma that called for a return to the origin of French music, he deftly broke the traditions of

tonality and freed his music from the restraints of harmonic function. In his quest for a distinctively “French” sound, he created a signature sensitivity of color, after a trait he admired in his predecessor, Rameau.

CONCLUSION

While the Sonata for Cello and Piano shows Debussy's rejection of forms such as the symphony, which he associated with Germanic music, it does not overemphasize French tradition. It is interesting to note that, in the Cello Sonata, he did not resist the symphony's common structures, the cyclic sonata form; certainly, Debussy must have been fully aware that many symphonies in the Austro-German tradition were marked by such forms. In establishing cyclic sonata form in the Sonata for Cello and Piano, Debussy may have displayed irony as he preserved the cyclic form, which carried political meaning. However, he used his own modifications to undermine the cyclic sense and employ thematic material in new, expressive ways.

Debussy expands tonality by evoking Rameau's harmonic strategy, as seen in the Prologue. He also foregrounds intervallic relationships to depict the spontaneous in the Serenade. He uses tonalities that blend with various non-German ideas in the Finale. All these aspects show him to be a composer who shared many of the same aspirations as other composers who searched for a French musical tradition in a wartime political environment. But he also sought to challenge those very traditions. Recognizing the French traits and Debussy's innovations in the Sonata for Cello and Piano, musicians can better appreciate the style of the composition and express the rich musical details that are contained in this work.

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APPENDIX A

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Dear Broude Brothers,

I am a Doctoral Candidate in Collaborative Piano at Arizona State University. In my Doctoral dissertation on Debussy' Cello Sonata, I discussed the Rameau's harmonic writing in the Overture (measure 1-14) of his *Les Fêtes de Polymnie*, and how it relates to the theme of the Prologue of Debussy's Cello Sonata. I will need to reprint specific measures from the score in my paper for reference and comparative studies.

I accessed the score on IMSLP, but I would like to learn from you to see if I would need for your permission to reprint the score in a dissertation.

Thank you very much for your time. I am looking forward to hear from you soon.

Best regards,

Peipei Song

Phone: 740-591-1993